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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA: MAJORS LIST CERTIFICATION

REF: SECSTATE 94578

1. (SBU) Summary: Though Colombia remains a major illicit drug producing and trafficking country, the GOC is an unwavering ally in the fight against narcotics production and distribution. Colombia has been an enthusiastic partner in the development of innovative approaches to narcotics interdiction. Under President Uribe's leadership, cocaine seizures are at all-time record levels and the GOC is on track to set new aerial eradication records again in 2005. The attached certification report card highlights the GOC's commitment to U.S. counter-narcotics goals and suggests areas requiring further attention. End summary.

2. (SBU) In 2004, the GOC once again set new aerial eradication records.

-- The Colombian National Police (CNP) sprayed more than 136,500 hectares of coca and over 3000 hectares of opium poppy in CY2004. Through June 30, 2005, the CNP had sprayed over 95,500 hectares of coca and 1100 hectares of opium poppy. In addition to spray operations, the GOC has embarked on an ambitious manual eradication program that entails the mobilization of over 40 mobile eradication teams. By mid-year these teams had manually eradicated over 9,500 hectares of coca. The Uribe government has identified an ambitious target of 40,000 hectares over two years. The GOC will have to earmark more resources to this program, including shifting of additional security personnel from other public security duties, if this goal is to be attained.

-- The GOC has taken steps to ensure that the aerial eradication program is conducted without undue risk to human health and the environment, as specified by Colombian and U.S. law. These measures include semi-annual spray program monitoring and verification, as required by the Environmental Management Plan for aerial eradication. A scientific study commissioned by the Organization of American States concluded that glyphosate, as used in the eradication program in Colombia, does not present a significant risk to human health. Nonetheless, there remains vigorous opposition to aerial eradication-especially in national parks and protected areas.

3. (SBU) In 2003, the GOC restarted an aerial interdiction program (Air Bridge Denial, or ABD program) to interdict aircraft carrying illicit drugs and related contraband.

-- The GOC worked with the USG to establish safety and legal procedures as a prerequisite for restarting USG assistance for an ABD program in Colombia. The ABD program was restarted in August 2003 and since then has led to the interdiction and/or destruction of 21 illegal aircraft. The ABD program is constrained by the lack of Colombian interceptors, dedicated ground forces, and other resources to follow up Unidentified, Assumed Suspect (UAS) tracks and to terminate law enforcement actions on the ground. As a result, abandoned aircraft are destroyed from the air without the seizure of drugs and other contraband, or the apprehension of suspect aircrew.

4. (SBU) In 2004, the GOC expanded its airport, port, and road interdiction programs.

-- Airport interdiction: The Airport Interdiction Project (AIP) was initiated in 2001 to share intelligence to interdict illegal drug shipments originating at Colombia's international airports. Units from airport security, the National Security Service (DAS), and the CNP's Anti-narcotics Directorate (DIRAN) received special equipment and training to identify drug-carrying couriers and detect hidden compartments, as well as to identify the organizations behind these illegal activities. In 2004, the AIP led to the seizure of 3.7 metric tons of cocaine and 360 kilograms of heroin and the arrest of 215 couriers. With the assistance of DEA and NAS, the GOC expanded the airport interdiction program in 2004 to include airports at Medellin, Cali, and Barranquilla. Medellin and Cali AIP units have begun X-ray operations and negotiations are

ongoing for the construction of facilities for the AIP in Barranquilla.

-- Seaport Security Program: Colombia's eight seaports have active port security programs staffed by DIRAN teams. All ports lack adequate DIRAN personnel, including binomial teams (canine and guide), to inspect an acceptable percentage of export cargo. The CNP is cognizant of this shortcoming but is unable to assign additional personnel at this time due to pressing security demands elsewhere. As an alternative, NAS and U.S. ICE representatives are exploring ways to enhance the effectiveness of current DIRAN forces through more effective utilization of mechanical detection equipment.

-- Road interdiction: The CNP Antinarcotics Police (DIRAN) and other units employ their INL-funded Road Interdiction equipment at both fixed and mobile checkpoints.

-- GOC Public Forces (Military and Police) seized a combined 178 metric tons of cocaine HCl and cocaine base in 2004. Through the first half of 2005, seizures amounted to 101 metric tons of cocaine/base. Thus far in 2005, Public Forces have seized 468 kilograms of heroin compared to 721 kilograms in all of 2004.

-- With assistance from the Narcotics Affairs Section and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the CNP Antinarcotics Police established the largest polygraph unit in Latin America. This unit completed training in early 2005, is fully-equipped, and has begun the process of vetting police and other personnel assigned to security tasks in Colombia's air and sea ports.

15. (SBU) The GOC continues to extradite suspected criminals indicted by the United States. Most were indicted on narcotics charges.

-- Colombia extradited 91 fugitives to the United States during CY 2004. Thus far in CY 2005, an additional 41 suspects have been extradited to stand trial in the United States and 57 cases are pending. The GOC has repeatedly stated that it will continue to extradite criminals who have violated the laws of other countries.

16. (SBU) The USG encouraged the GOC to decrease the time and streamline procedures required for forfeiture of assets seized from convicted drug traffickers.

-- The GOC has intervened three large firms recently. First, the Drogas la Rebaja, the largest retail pharmacy chain in the country was intervened to prevent the Rodriguez-Orjuela family from continuing to make use of the Drogas la Rebaja assets. Similarly, the GOC intervened the Grajales Group of firms to prevent the Henao clan from using these assets. Grajales is a large, integrated producer of fresh produce, wine, and processed foods in the Valle de Cauca area (near Cali). The GOC also intervened a large retail chain, Casas Estrellas, which had significant financial participation by the Henao clan. The GOC continues to operate all three firms pending their definitive takeover by the GOC and eventual sale.

-- The GOC revised its assets forfeiture law in 2002 and has moved aggressively on its asset seizure program in 2004. The GOC has also embarked on a campaign to seize property from small-scale narcotics producers as well. Targeting small landowners engaged in illicit crop production is being combined with aggressive manual eradication to reinforce the Uribe government's zero-tolerance policy.

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